

Contemporary Approaches to Yugoslavia and its
History
Post-Socialist Historical and Cultural Revisionism

The Importance of Totalitarian and Ethno-nationalist
Paradigms in the Study of Yugoslavia

B.A. Politics with East European Studies – Final Year Dissertation

Abstract

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 symbolically announced the imminent fall of communist and socialist regimes throughout Eastern Europe. This unique historical, political, and social momentum (re-)opened the gates to a new golden age for historiography and historical revisionism. The magnitude of the collapse was not the same in every country as some countries had to deal with ethno-nationalist chauvinistic imperatives of nation-state building in addition to the already severe consequences of 'transition': Yugoslavia was one of these and the country collapsed in a bloody conflict in the first half of the 1990s.

Through a critical study of contemporary post-Yugoslav narratives of its history and culture, we discover, that historical and cultural revisionism started in the liberal second half of the 1980s in Yugoslavia when the 'anti-totalitarian' intellectuals championed the rise of (ethno-)nationalism at the expense of Yugoslav identity. In sum, the Yugoslav 'anti-totalitarian' discourse was actually one of the main causes for the emergence of nationalism and eventually for the subsequent bloody collapse of Yugoslavia.

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« The peoples of Yugoslavia lived for several decades in their own country, building not only cities, bridges, roads, railways but also a certain complex of values were, among other things: "the ideology and practice of socialism" (today those same ex-Yugoslavs that call that "communism", "Tito's regime", "communist dictatorship")...Then there was that famous "Yugoslavism." This implied a multinational and multicultural community and was reinforced over the years not only by Tito's popular slogans-"Preserve brotherhood and unity like the apple of your eye"-but also by the practice of daily life. Today those same peoples claim that they lived in a prison of nations, and that it was that idea, the idea of Yugoslavism-not they themselves-which is responsible for the present brutal war » (Ugrešić, 1998, p. 5).

Yugoslavia used to be a rather peculiar country. Founded in 1946 by the charismatic chief of Yugoslav WWII resistance, Tito, Yugoslavia or 'Land of the South-Slavs' quickly embarked on its own way towards socialism while championing an ideological alternative 'third way' during the Cold War following its break with Stalin in 1948. Yugoslavia was a country of so much diversity and complexity in a very small territory and enjoyed four decades of stability and peace thanks to both a unique socialist system based on a self-management system and social market mechanisms and a strong Yugoslav identity conveyed by its strong cultural identity (music, film and sports).

However, in the beginning of the 1990s, the rise of nationalism rushed the Yugoslav dream to collapse in a bloody conflict. Ever since, everything directly or indirectly linked with 'Yugoslavism' has been condemned or is on its way to disappear. New Balkan states have emerged with strong and exclusive national identities, each one based on new or reconstructed historical myths but all sharing a strong feeling of both anti-Socialism and 'anti-Yugoslavism'. Why, how and when did such a dramatic shift happen?

In my first part, I intend to define and theoretically assess historiography and historical revisionism in the general post-socialist context. I will build upon Todor Kuljić's great account of Yugoslav post-socialist historical revisionism

and his precious before-after study of the works of two (former) Yugoslav historians, Bilandzic and Petranovic.

In a second part, I will study the different post-Yugoslav narratives and theories focusing on Yugoslavia and its history prevailing in the region and legitimizing the new local chauvinistic historiographies.

Then, I will study the contemporary narratives on Yugoslavia through its culture and thus its cinematography as the latter is/was an essential feature of Yugoslav identity and history. After having introduced Yugoslav cinematography, I will discuss the post-Yugoslav polemics on its cinematography that represents very well the dominant post-Yugoslav paradigms.

This will eventually allow me to figure out, that the dominant anti-totalitarian paradigm prevailing in the post-Yugoslav context did not appear out of the removal of the socialist project (Yugoslav wars) but with it and, I would argue, even before (i.e. the liberal second-half of the 1980s) therefore the anti-totalitarian discourse is not (only) a consequence of the causes of Yugoslavia (bloody) collapse but also one of its main causes.

Literature Review

General Literature on Yugoslavia

Soon after 1989, Yugoslavia, the particular socialist regime lying between East and West was about to collapse. Its bloody collapse made it a very debated topic among academics and journalists in the 1990s. While multiple reasons for its collapse were approached and studied in multiple books and journalist essays, Dejan Jovic's article "The Disintegration of Yugoslavia" is a particularly good first reading for those searching for a quality paper on the complex disintegration of Yugoslavia (Jović, 2001). Similarly, his book, *Yugoslavia, A State that Withered Away* (2008) emphasizes the need to study the Yugoslav collapse through its ideology and can be considered a breakthrough source as it dismisses and critically assess the traditional simplistic accounts of its collapse. The numerous arguments he discusses (the economic argument; the 'ancient ethnic hatred' argument; the 'nationalism' argument; the cultural argument; the 'international politics' argument; the 'role of personality' argument; and the 'fall of empires' argument) actually made him conclude that the true difficulty in discussing Yugoslavia's collapse was the difficulty of making the distinction between "the objective factors and the perception of these elements by political actors themselves and their resultant actions" (Jović, 2001, p. 114).

Historiography and Revisionism in post-Yugoslav Literature

The lack of objective factors in the post-Yugoslav context is very well explained by Todor Kuljic in his book *The Balkans Rachomon : historiography and literature on dissolution of SFRY* (2002) and his article *Was Tito the Last Habsburg* (Kuljic, 2007). Indeed, in the latter book, he brilliantly exposes the difficulties one faces when he wants to research the history of the SFRY.

He argues that in less than half a century Yugoslavia, has consecutively witnessed two politically motivated attempts to reconstruct its past: "an authoritarian internationalist one in 1945 and the ongoing restorative pluralist nationalistic one which began in the early 1990s" therefore the critical processing of Yugoslav socialism did not happen and consequently the

concept of Yugoslavia cannot be objectively assessed as it still remained “somewhat confused, lacking the theoretical and methodological underpinnings which could evaluate a sober re-evaluation of the past” (Kuljic, 2007, p. 85).

While in other post-socialist countries, unique official historiographies emerged with national ‘historical policies’ (GDR) or a Kuhnian paradigm shift in the study of their history occurred (Soviet Union)¹, in Yugoslavia “the uniform Yugoslav outlook on history” was abruptly replaced with multiple exclusive chauvinistic historiographies written by and for the newly-created Balkan states (Kuljić, 2002) conditioning post-Yugoslav historiography and literature ever since (see Bilandzic’s and Petranovic’s works).

This shift in the intellectual paradigm surrounding Yugoslav history can easily be assimilated to a ‘damnatio memoriae’² process quoted in Zoran Terzić’s PhD thesis “An artistic approach to history” (Terzić, 2009, p. 6) or the notion of *Siegergeschichte* (History of the victors) that was prevailing in post-socialist countries i.e. anti-fascist rhetoric was replaced with anti-totalitarian rhetoric, brotherhood and unity with the idea of Yugoslavia as an illusion and a dungeon of people; fervent Titoism with vehement anti-Titoism and self-management as a true democracy vs socialist totalitarianism (Kuljić, 2002, p. 20).

While the bias in (local) historiography and literature was making every critical examination of Yugoslavia and its past very hard, this comprehensive research (written in English) on historical revisionism and post-Yugoslav intellectual paradigms allowed academics to further develop a certain set of theories and critiques on the different post-Yugoslav narratives. The ‘anti-totalitarian’ (Žižek, 2001) (Komelj, 2012) (Kirn, Dissertation, 2012) ‘transitional’ (Buden, 2007), ‘orientalist/balkanization’ (Todorova, 2009), ‘post-socialist’ (Pupovac, 2010) critiques were inspired by the important academic debates following the demise of socialism in countries such as the Soviet Union.

¹ For a detailed account on the Kuhnian paradigm shift that occurred in the study of Soviet history, see Sheila Fitzpatrick (2007)

² In the Roman Empire, once an emperor’s reign ended in tyranny, the successor erased all of his predecessor’s insignias (Terzić, 2009)

I think of course, of Sheila Fitzpatrick's revisionist approach towards Soviet history (Fitzpatrick, 2007) in reaction to the totalitarianist view of the Soviet Union (Getty & Manning, 1993); Alexei Yurchak's revisionist dissection of the Manichean character of the Soviet totalitarian narrative and rejection of the dichotomous categories used for the depiction of Soviet reality (oppression versus resistance, repression versus freedom, the collective versus the individual...) (Yurchak, 2006, p. 5).

Post-Yugoslav Cultural Revisionism

However, Yugoslavia was not only studied and 'revised' through its history and peculiar socialist regime (self-management), Dubravka Ugresic's book *The Culture of Lies* (Ugrešić, 1998), opened the debate on the cultural (and artistic) revisionism that was taking place simultaneously. Following Volcic argument, "'Yugoslav' (pop) culture (rock, television, films, sports) was crucial in legitimizing and championing Yugoslav identity", it was not very surprising to expect (ethno-)nationalist and totalitarian narratives trying to 'erase' or discredit it (Volčič, 2007).

Ugresic explains how almost overnight "writers became Croatian in the same way that the former citizens—who until then were Yugoslavs—became Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, etc." (Kovačević, 2007, p. 305) as a consequence the 'official' chauvinistic cultural policies that made Yugoslavia become an "almost forbidden word ever since" (Kovačević, 2007, p. 313).

This key characteristic of Yugoslavia (and one of Jovic's reason for its collapse) came to be dominated by local chauvinistic 'academic' whose main objectives were either to destroy and parcel Yugoslav identity along (ethno-)nationalist boundaries either to reduce any artistic or cultural product to its mere ideological function and therefore consider it as propaganda (Kirn, *Transformation of Memorial Sites in the Post-Yugoslav Context*, 2012).

However, in contemporary studies on Yugoslavia, culture has become very popular among academic debates either as an explanation for its collapse or

as a tool for a comprehensive understanding of Yugoslav history. Academics launched a counter-offensive to the cultural revisionism of Yugoslavia in order to save at least its culture. Yugoslav music (Gordy, 1999), its literature and poetry (Wachtel, 1998), its art in general (Komelj, 2012) and more recently its visual culture (Luthar & Pušnik, 2010) (Šuber & Karamanić, 2012) and in particular its film started to be critically re-assessed and similar revisionist narratives identified and denounced (Iordanova, 2001) (Goulding, 2002) (Levi, 2007).

Post-Yugoslav Literature on Yugoslav Film

Since the creation of Yugoslavia, film and cinematography occupied a central space in everyday life of Yugoslavia and its ideology. Vida T. Johnson is right when she states “nowhere was the idea and reality of “Yugoslavia” more fruitful than in its cinema.” (Johnson, 2009).

Three major contributions in the field of Yugoslav film need to be highlighted. A great introduction to Yugoslav cinematography and film is Goulding’s chronologic and detailed *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience 1945-2001* (Goulding, 2002), another important contribution is Iordanova’s *Cinema of Flames* (Iordanova, 2001). As the first book introduces and covers the entire period from 1945 to 2001, it is certainly the best way to get an insight in Yugoslav cinematography as a the majority of important films and movements are introduced: the socialist realism from the beginning, the partisan films, the New Film, the ‘Black Wave’, the ‘Red Wave’, the ‘Prague School’, and the New Yugoslav film.

The second book is a bit more Balkan-centred and is the first to theoretically and critically assess the ‘Balkan’ or ‘Eastern European’ film and medias. It wisely assesses the ‘Balkans’ as a political concept and historical construction through the ‘Balkan wars’ and their representation in movies (Kusturica’s *Underground* or Dragojevic’s *Pretty Villages Pretty Flames*). The national paradigm is also discussed (Iordanova, 2001, pp. 234-235).

The last book is a truly great contribution to the field of Yugoslav culture and film: Levi’s *Disintegration in frames – Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and*

Post-Yugoslav Cinema (Levi, 2007) is particularly important as it is the first book to critically assess the different post-Yugoslav approaches on Yugoslav film. It analyses Yugoslav film through both its aesthetics and the ideologies present in the post-Yugoslav context. Levi's inter-medial approach (linking philosophy, film artists, literature, art and everyday life) provides us with a valuable insight on the impact, culture and movies had on the "irrationalities of the narrow-minded, ethnonational mythomanias emerging in the 1980s" (Levi, 2007, p. 53). It introduces us with the different post-Yugoslav approaches towards its cinematography: totalitarian, (ethno-)nationalist, neo-liberal, nostalgic, orientalist, post-socialist which are all linked and intertwined.

Recently, new literature has been published on Yugoslav cinematography in newly established international journals (written in English) such as *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* or *KinoKultura* (online) where academics such as Nebojsa Jovanovic, Greg DeCuir, Zala Volcic or Gal Kirn raised very interesting debates and eventually started to critically assess the political and chauvinistic post-Yugoslav attempts to destroy or revise Yugoslav film history³. I will mainly support my arguments in this dissertation using the recent polemics raised by the latter new group of academics interested in Yugoslavia and its cinematography (DeCuir, 2010) (Johnson, 2009) (Jovanović, *Breaking the Wave*, 2011) (Jovanović, *Fadil Hadžić u optici totalitarne paradigme*, 2011) (Jovanović, *Futur Antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema*, 2012) (Jovanović, 2011) (Kirn, *New Yugoslav Film - A Humanist Cinema ? Not Really*, 2012) (Pavičić, 2011) (Pogačar, 2010).

Historiography and Revisionism in Post-Socialist Context

Theoretical Approach and Definition

Very often people take history as granted; they read it as an objective account of what happened. We all had exams in history or at least answered some sort of question when it comes to history. This suggests there is one answer.

³ Jovanovic refers to the works of post-Yugoslav film elites (film critics and film historians) Ranko Munitić (1999), Senadin Musabegović (2008), Nebojša Pajkić (2010), Ivo Škrabalo (1998, 2006), Bogdan Tirnanić (2008), Petar Volk (1996, 2001), and the Serbian critical circle *Novi kadrovi* (Ognjanović/Velisavljević 2008).

However, academics and historians know very well the past is more of a dynamic and disputed process, a construction over time rather than a simple and unique product that you learn by heart. Of course, there are facts that are impossible to deny such as dates of certain events on which everybody agrees; everybody knows what happened on the 8th May 1945, nevertheless other historical events and periods are hotly debated between academics and historians and sometimes they disagree which leads to several possible 'answers' or theories when it comes to a particular historical period, regime or event.

The discipline of history aiming to reconstruct historical events, clarify their genesis, and interpret their interconnectedness and function within a narrower or broader time frame is called historiography. This process of (re-)writing history should not be misused with historical revisionism. Todor Kuljic brilliantly defines and differentiates the two concepts:

"Historiography entails the continual re-examination of the historical picture to prevent its crystallization into a static legend. Such re-examination differs from revision in that the latter is motivated by clear or covert intentions to justify narrow or broad political objectives. Because the people in government are keenly interested in how the past is interpreted, one always discerns in the interpretation a layer of socio-integrative knowledge used to justify the order. This is why the need to revise history following a radical change of the nature of the regime and the abolition of the traditional socio-integrative thought is understandable. However, revisionists do not merely reinterpret the facts; they also twist their meaning or contradict them outright. This is revisionism in the narrow sense of the word." (Kuljić, 2002, p. 9).

In the post-socialist context, revisionism mainly consisted in replacing the former anti-fascist rhetoric on which communism was very often built with the new anti-totalitarian rhetoric. Since the end of the Cold War, the ubiquitous and universal anti-communist consonance is used to absolve domestic quislings and fascists from the past so that they could be projected as patriotic and anti-totalitarian forces.

Examples from the post-Socialist World

In the Soviet Union, the critical re-assessment of the Soviet past reached its peak during the perestroika and was accomplished mostly by political journalists as the archives were inaccessible.⁴ The Soviet regime was demonized, treated as totalitarian and equated with the Nazi regime. The totalitarian paradigm is also still present all around Eastern former socialist countries.

For example in the GDR, the Bundestag set up commissions of inquiry to 'Overcome the legacy of GDR dictatorship in the process of creating German unity'. Its goal was to erase any GDR nostalgia from the last East German by altering the memorials sites and through 'anti-totalitarian enlightenment'. Nazism was relativized by demonizing the GDR but also spreading the formula of 'the two German dictatorships' (Hitler and Ulbricht-Honecker) (Kuljić, 2002, p. 12)

Yugoslav post-Socialist Revisionism – Petranovic and Bilandzic

Yugoslavia was no exception. Kuljic illustrates the fact the majority of historical accounts written on Yugoslavia and its history by the local are biased and therefore cannot be trusted with a comprehensive and brilliant comparative study of the revisionist works of two former Yugoslav historians Bilandzic and Petranovic. Kuljic analyses and compares the attitudes of the two historians towards Yugoslav history before and after the fall of socialism, the results are simply striking.⁵

First example, "Petranović wrote in 1981 that in the late 1960s the 'LCY stood in the forefront of a process of democratization while itself undergoing significant change' (Petranović, 1981, p. 574), that the 'idea and practice of

⁴ A deeper insight into Soviet history revisionism is offered by Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick, 2007)

⁵ See Bilandžić, Dušan, (1999), *Hrvatska moderna povijest* (Modern Croatian History), Golden marketing, Zagreb in comparison with Bilandžić, Dušan, (1979), *Historija SFRJ - glavni procesi* (History of the SFRY - the main processes), Skolska knjiga, Zagreb but also Petranović, B., (1981), *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1978* (History of Yugoslavia 1918-1978), Nolit, Belgrade in comparison with Petranović, B., (1993), *Jugoslovensko iskustvo srpske nacionalne integracije* (The Yugoslav Experience of Serb National Integration), Sluzbeni list SRJ, Belgrade.

self-management transcended Yugoslavia's frontiers', and that the various ideas of worker participation 'revealed the extent to which the participation of workers in production and its organization had become established as an unavoidable issue of our epoch' (Petranović, 1981, p. 549). Some ten years later he describes self-management as an 'utterly corrupt and demagogic variant of management which placed emphasis on the technique by which the communist establishment clung to power' (Petranović, 1994, p. 284)" in (Kuljić, 2002, p. 27)

Second example, in his 1979 book, Bilandzic "states that through the revolutionary act of exploiting the bourgeoisie the working class became free from the old wage relations" (1979, p. 116) and that the 'once unequal nations in particular were given satisfaction'. Twenty years later he described Yugoslavia as an 'artificial state creation' (1999, p. 55) and equated Socialism and Totalitarianism (1999, pp. 134, 174)" in (Kuljić, 2002, p. 29).

Kuljic explains such a drastic historical revisionism by borrowing Wolfgang Viperma's notion of 'necrophilic anti-Communism' which refers to an obsession with the communist past in the post-socialist world. The newly established historiographies (of Serbia and Croatia following our example) have been therefore set up in order demonize Socialism and to manifest a complete break with their past, which is typical of post-socialist revisionism (Kuljić, 2002, pp. 11-12).

In sum, in the post-Yugoslav context, historiography or "the continual re-examination of the historical picture to prevent its crystallization into a static legend" was heavily confused with (official) historical revisionism which "was motivated by clear or covert intentions to justify narrow or broad political objectives." (Kuljić, 2002, p. 9)

Post-Yugoslav Narratives/Theories on Yugoslavia and its history

During my reading, I came across a very wide array of post-Yugoslav theories and narratives on Yugoslavia and it is very important to define them in order

to be able to spot them easily while reading other sources and therefore be able to assess critically an article, an idea or an argument. These theories are actually different facets of the historical and cultural revisionism that still occur in Yugoslavia. These theories have been critically assessed only recently with the works of Slavoj Žižek, (Žižek, 2001) Boris Buden (Buden, 2007), Ozren Pupovac (Pupovac, 2010), Pavle Levi (Levi, 2007) and Todor Kuljic (Kuljic, 2007) (Kuljić, 2002).

Gal Kirn's dissertation "Conceptualisation of Politics and Reproduction in the work of Louis Althusser: case of Socialist Yugoslavia (University of Gorica, 2012) should be considered as a major contribution to the understanding of Yugoslavia and its history as all the major post-Yugoslav theories are precisely defined and critically assessed.

The (anti-)Totalitarian Paradigm

The first is definitely the most widespread and most important of the post-socialist world i.e. the (anti-)totalitarian paradigm (as the majority of the other theories can be considered as variations or different perspective of this same theory). Miklavz Komelj argues 'totalitarianism' is a Western invention coined during the Cold War in order to discredit the Soviet version of socialism by equating communism with totalitarianism in order for one part of history to be forgotten. It reminds us the debate over the revisionism of the Soviet History (Fitzpatrick, 2007). He describes it as a certain complex of ideas that most generally entail an "ironic distancing against socialist traditions" (Komelj, 2012). Nebojsa Jovanovic, considers the totalitarian paradigm as a 'theory of everything' that is derived from Stalinism therefore one just needs to substitute Soviet with Yugoslav and Stalin with Tito in the following quote to obtain the Yugoslav version of the totalitarian paradigm:

"The Soviet system under Stalin consisted of a nonpluralist, hierarchical dictatorship in which command authority existed only at the top of the pyramid of political power. Ideology and violence were monopolies of the ruling elite, which passed its orders down a pseudo-military chain of command. [. . .] At the top of the ruling elite stood an autocratic Stalin whose

personal control was virtually unlimited in all areas of life and culture, from art to zoology. Major policy articulation and implementation involved the actualization of Stalin's ideas, whims, and plans, which in turn flowed from his psychological condition. By definition, autonomous spheres of social and political activity did not exist at all in Soviet society. [. . .] In any case, the Soviet populace and rank-and-file party members remained outside the political process, objects acted upon or manipulated from above but never historical actors in their own right." (Getty & Manning, 1993, pp. 1-2) (Jovanović, *Futur Antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema*, 2012, p. 151).

Gal Kirn argues the totalitarian narrative to be "an essential ideological background of different nationalistic historiographies and everyday journalism" and which in the post-Yugoslav context "destined Yugoslavia to an image of gloomy repressive past and projected a conspiracy of an ever more corrupted communist elite that dominated and controlled all social spheres" (Kirn, *New Yugoslav Film - A Humanist Cinema ? Not Really*, 2012, p. 12). It is important to note, Hannah Arendt in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973) explicitly states that Tito's Yugoslavia is not a totalitarian state.

An important feature of the 'totalitarian paradigm' is that it automatically assumes that "people living in communism could not believe in socialist ideas and values" (Jovanović, *Futur Antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema*, 2012) and therefore condemns 'Yugoslavia' to be an illegitimate construction crafted by manipulative leadership" (Šuber & Karamanić, 2012, p. 8).

Drawing on Alexei Yurchak's revisionist dissection of the Manichean character of the Soviet totalitarian narrative and his notion of 'binary socialism,' which dismisses not only the thesis that "socialism was 'bad' and 'immoral' or had been experienced as such by the Soviet people before the changes of Perestroika" (Yurchak, 2006, p. 5), but also refutes a whole set of dichotomous categories used for the depiction of Soviet reality (oppression versus resistance, repression versus freedom, the collective versus the individual), Jovanovic argues: "the Yugoslav-Titoist variation of the totalitarian paradigm is articulated and maintained through the very same categories and dichotomies." (Jovanović, 2011) (Jovanović, Fadil Hadžić u

optici totalitarne paradigme , 2011) (Jovanović, *Futur Antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema*, 2012).

The (ethno-)Nationalist Paradigm

Another very important and present framework is the ethno-nationalist narrative. Unquestionably, this essential feature of the post-Yugoslav world (and more generally of the post-socialist context) is based on the nationalistic model of “one nation in one state”. According to this paradigm, Yugoslavia was nothing more than an artificial and “temporary contingency” (Halligan, 2010, p. 5), a “communist prison of nations” (Kovačević, 2007, p. 302). Result, in the 1990s, many Western academic and journalists supporting this discourse actively supported the local nationalists and their (“justified”) desires for independence. In their eyes, it was merely a modern derivation of the ‘self-determination of people’ concept. This led to the revival of nationalistic discourse, nationalist and chauvinistic historiography, the reinvention of traditions, but also the rising ethnic strife and serious breaching of the right of national minorities and marginalised groups in each state, ultimately to war. (Jović, 2001) (Kirn, *Dissertation*, 2012)

The Nostalgic post-Socialist Perspective

This perspective actually stems from the totalitarian paradigm. Owing to severe economic crisis and decline in living standards under nearly all post-socialist regimes the people at large were not overly inclined to demonize their communist past because it remained in their memory as a period of relative stability (Kuljić, 2002, p. 16).

Kirn explains it in detail:

“While the totalitarian perspective sees Tito as an oppressive dictator, the nostalgic affective attitude most often worships the great leader Tito, his iron fist that struggled against a nationalist and primitive people. If the first view sees Tito is as a demonized figure, as the bloody dictator, then the second view glorifies him. This view treats its socialist past as a memory of *good old*

time and exhibit it in galleries or museums as a commodified socialist art or canonized as relevant art purified from ideology. The Yugoslav context substitutes 'Goodbye Lenin' with Goodbye Tito. The more the cultural discourses idealize the good old times, the more they confirm Goodbye Tito, which drives the last nail into the coffin of communism." (Kirn, Dissertation, 2012) (Petrović, 2010) (Volčič, 2007).

The post-Socialist Paradigm

Ozren Pupovac considers "post-socialism" itself to be reductive as he considers the post-socialist signifier to be biased from its inception as it implies an end (post-). It considers 'socialism' had to fail and therefore post-socialism is the 'natural course of things' that follows:

"How does post-socialism begin? The troubles of the post-socialist beginning begin already at the level of nomination. For as we can see already from its proper name, the post-socialist situation bears an immense mark of the past. It bears the mark of an end. The very beginning of post-socialism, its historical inception, immediately appears as a sign of an end, a beginning in and through an end: the end of socialism, the end of communism. But is this end, this negativity all there is here? Is the substance of the historical state which we call post-socialism to be found only in the past, in the past in the negative sense, that is? Is post-socialism simply an announcement of something that has ended, something that has passed? Because, one might as well also ask, what is it that begins properly speaking, after the end? Is there something that post-socialism, from the very moment of its commencement, can claim as its own, outside of the simple fact of the negation of its anteriority, outside of the sign of the end? But, then again, we should perhaps first of all ask does something begin at all here?" (Pupovac, 2010) in (Kirn, Dissertation, 2012).

The Transitional Paradigm

The transition paradigm is very similar to the post-socialist discourse. It argues that countries could not shift from a socialist/totalitarian regimes to a 'normal' Western liberal democracy immediately. It implies a certain notion of neo-imperialism and neo-liberalism: 'the West needs to civilize/democratize the primitive East'.

Boris Buden critically assess it in the following quote: "According to this narrative, after having overthrown totalitarian rule the societies of former Eastern Europe don't enter directly into the world of developed capitalism and Western democracy, but rather must undergo first the process of transition to this final condition, which poses as normality, that is as the universal norm of historical development in general. The process of transition is accordingly understood as the process of normalization. So everything that happens during this process automatically gains the teleological meaning intrinsically tied to the transitional narrative. This also includes the logic that before things get better – normal, capitalist, democratic, etc – they must first get worse in comparison to the former situation, concretely to the state of actual socialism. But the problem is that the transition process can turn into a real disaster. This is precisely what happened in former Yugoslavia: the collapse of the state, civil wars with horrible destruction, ethnic cleansing, atrocities, human loses, economic breakdown, political chaos" (Buden, 2007) in (Kirn, Dissertation, 2012). This view actually whitewashes capitalism and the traumatic political, social and economic consequences of its restoration in former Yugoslavia (Komelj, 2012).

The Eastern Label/Orientalism/Balkanization

The 'orientalist' narrative views the Balkans as a land of eternal ethnic animosities and religious strife narrative. It is inspired by Edward Said's notion of *Orientalism* (Vintage Books: 1978). The Balkans can therefore be projected as an 'Orientalist' view on the region.. The concept is brilliantly exposed and criticized in Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (OUP: 2009) in which she denounces the artificial and Western ethnocentric nature of the construction of the label 'Balkans'. The bloody nature of the Yugoslav "democratic transition" could therefore be blamed on the ancient ethnic

hatreds and the (repeating) history of the region that is condemned to be in perpetual crisis. This narrative was in majority championed by the first journalistic discourses from Western media on the conflict, but not only. Some very popular academic books also claimed that Yugoslavia was an artificial entity that was held together only by a strong dictator Tito, where ethnical animosities have quasi-eternal essence, thus, these Balkan people are not able to live in peaceful co-existence.

A Contemporary Approach to Yugoslavia through its Culture and Yugoslavism

Yugoslav Film as Representative of Yugoslav Culture

Denich (1994) is right when she argues former Yugoslavia was, crucially, “about a specific cultural space, a civic space that was based on the socialist culture of daily life.” (Denich, 1994). Indeed, the main markers of Yugoslav identity were its “unique rock’n’roll, Yugoslav news media outlets and films, distinctly Yugoslavian consumer products, and sports were seen linking the youth cultures of the different republics.” These media positioned and addressed the citizens of Yugoslavia’s six member nations as Yugoslavs and could arguably shape their attachment to a common Yugoslav space. (Denich, 1994) (Levi, 2007) (Volčič, 2007, p. 23). Yugoslav visual culture and its films clearly played a crucial role in providing and mobilizing Yugoslav identity, as Johnson remarks, “nowhere was the idea and reality of “Yugoslavia” more fruitful than in its cinema.” (Johnson, *From Yugoslav to Serbian Cinema*, 2009).

Cinematography in Yugoslavia – an Introduction

In Yugoslavia as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, cinema was considered one of the most important visual arts. Each country in Eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia, had its own filmmaking school and some degree of independence, even though they had developed in a similar way. The film industry in Eastern Europe developed in a special social and political context

compared to other industries such as France or Italy. In the immediate aftermath of WWII, most of the films fulfilled a political purpose and shared a common interest like depicting the problems of socialist societies. While the entire East European cinema was, at first, being strongly influenced by the Soviet model (Zhdanov "aesthetics" or socialist realism), Tito's break with Stalin in 1948, put Yugoslavia on its own route towards socialism therefore officially discrediting socialist realism already in the early 1950s⁶ (Komelj, 2012, p. 59). Very quickly, the ideological break with the Soviet Union led Yugoslavia to adopt more liberal reforms allowing artists a more liberal approach towards their art and new film tendencies to appear (DeCuir J. G., 2012, p. 405)

Tito loved movies and believed in their social and educational role, therefore a particular emphasis was put on cinema and Yugoslav film very quickly became one of its most valuable exports, the films enjoyed considerable success both locally and internationally winning several awards at international festivals (Goulding, 2002). As great film studios such as Avala Film were set up, Yugoslavia managed to attract numerous American, French or Italian co-productions (Kelly's Heroes, 1970; Genghis Kahn, 1965). Dusan Makavejev, Aleksandar Petrovic, Zelimir Zilnik, Karpo Godina, Veljko Bulajic or Emir Kusturica represent just few of the most famous and successful Yugoslav directors.

In the 1990s, after four decades of peace and stability, the Yugoslav dream abruptly came to its end and brutally collapsed for multiple reasons (Jović, 2001). Nonetheless, during the conflict, all the belligerents have, for one of the main reasons for entering the war, "referred to the motif of allegedly protecting culture, not only one's national culture but also culture in the sense of European heritage and achievements" (Čolović, 2008, p. 14) (Levi, 2007, p. 7).

⁶ It was the influential writer Miroslav Krleža that actually rejected Socialist Realism as a cultural standard at his speech at Yugoslavia's VI Party Congress held in Zagreb in November 1952.

Yugoslav Cinematography after the Collapse

While Yugoslavia disappeared, its cinematography, “as a corpus of films, produced in a specific state, within a particular historical, social, and political constellation”, Jovanovic argues, is supposed to continue to exist, in the same manner as Weimar cinema or Soviet cinema still exist today. However, it seems that, in the post-Yugoslav context, the meaning of ‘Yugoslav cinema’ is about to perish. A good example would be the *Filmski Leksikon* (Kragic & Gilic, 2003), arguably the most ambitious and comprehensive source on film published in the ex-Yugoslav region, it is impossible to find a single Yugoslav film star or director (Jovanović, *Futur Antérieur of Yugoslav Cinema*, 2012, p. 149).

What happened to Ugresic, (Kovačević, 2007, p. 305), also happened to film directors and other artists.

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, each of the former Yugoslav federal republics extracted its own fraction of the Yugoslav cinematic legacy, and published its own history of national cinema (Iordanova, 2001).

Yugoslav cinema was merely reduced to the sum of its ethno-national components, hardly surprising for “anyone who knows how thoroughly the anti-socialist and anti-Yugoslav resentment suffuses the post-Yugoslav ideological landscape.” (Jovanović, *Bosnian Cinema in the Socialist Yugoslavia*, 2012).

Totalitarian Partisan Propaganda Films vs Black Wave Dissident Movies?

Two important polemics stem from the post-Yugoslav narrative on its cinematography: the partisan film spectacle as a propaganda tool and the black wave as a necessarily dissident aesthetic film movement.

In Yugoslavia’s visual culture, partisan film was the classic film genre. Yet its original socio-political context might be dead and gone for more than two decades now, Yugoslav partisan film, as a major cultural signpost of the socialist legacy, is still popping up every now and then in the post-socialist cultural production. Partisan film as the “integrationalist Yugoslav genre”

and the “joint tradition of all [...] Yugoslav republics”, represent *the* indivisible celluloid remainder of Yugoslavia, which stubbornly withstands the dismantlement of the history of Yugoslav cinema into separate histories of ethno-national cinemas and therefore remains very important.

The relegation of the partisan films to the paramount mechanism of the totalitarian manipulation relies on the dichotomy “Propaganda versus Art”, the fundamental binary postulated by the totalitarian paradigm in the sphere of arts and culture (Yurchak, 2006, p. 5). That bipolar frame conveniently reduces Yugoslav cinema to two sets of films and filmmakers and therefore the polarization of the artistic *milieu*. The Art pole is by rule reserved for the the “Black Wave” authors, deservedly praised for the most controversial works of the Yugoslav “New Film [*novi film*]” in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Opposed to that pantheon is what appears as the cinematic netherworld inhabited by the filmmakers whose works can merely be reduced to Titoist or communist propaganda. (Kirn, Dissertation, 2012)

A good example illustrating the ‘communist propaganda’ argument is the award-winning documentary film *Cinema Komunisto* (Turajlic, 2010) The film is a typical example of the totalitarian perspective on the Yugoslav film history as it pathetically emphasizes Tito’s fascination for film (Titostalgia) (Kirn, *New Yugoslav Film - A Humanist Cinema ? Not Really*, 2012, p. 12) while the great Yugoslav cinematography is reduced to propagandistic (socialist realist) representation of the National Liberation War.

Another important period of Yugoslav cinema is the period between 1962 and 1972, with the progressive tendency called New Yugoslav Film (Goulding 2002 and Levi 2007). The term New Yugoslav Film operated until 1969, when the official Party-intellectual journal *Borba* published an article from Dejan Jovičić, whose article should be seen as a start of an offensive that denounced new film as black film. The ‘Black Wave’ label became a political and an aesthetical disqualification used against the film-makers by the ideological apparatus of the state. (Kirn, *New Yugoslav Film - A Humanist Cinema ? Not Really*, 2012)

Contemporary readings of this film period raised many polemics starting

with the naming of this vast body of films itself. (Jovanović, *Breaking the Wave*, 2011) While some theorists agree more with the Black Wave cinema (DeCuir J. G., 2010), others accuse the latter's dissident and simplifying reading and prefer calling it: new Yugoslav film (Levi, 2007) (Jovanović, *Breaking the Wave*, 2011).

However, what is important in this polemic is that the term Black Wave in itself stresses, again, the Party vs Dissident antagonism which is part of the (anti-)totalitarian paradigm (Kirn, *New Yugoslav Film - A Humanist Cinema ? Not Really*, 2012).

The rising nationalist and chauvinistic movements that flourished following both Tito's death (1980) and the subsequent institutional reforms wisely took advantage of this polarization of the Yugoslav artistic and intellectual scene as they saw the (anti-)totalitarian paradigm as a great tool for undermining Yugoslav identity and therefore Yugoslavia in itself.

The Anti-Totalitarian Narrative as Explanation for the Collapse

Andrew Wachtel is thus right when he argues "it would not be an exaggeration to say that the nationalist political movements rose on the back of cultural ones rather than the other way around" (Wachtel, 1998, p. 184) as it was precisely in the field of culture that the Yugoslav "imagined community" was first questioned and contested

Levi, as well agrees with this thesis, as he argues "there is no doubt that the intellectual and cultural elites invested in nationalist mythomanias and static, phobic notions of collective identity are to be directly blamed as principal instigators, promoters, and rationalizers of ethnic hatred in the region" (Levi, 2007, p. 7).

Ana Devic's article confirms that "the real tragedy of the liberal, non-politicized, all-Yugoslav cultural space was that much of its cultural repertoire was co-opted by rival political elites during the last, ethno-populist, stage of the Yugoslav official nationalism." (Devic, 1998, p. 404)

The two key events in this respect are the appearance in 1986 of the 'Memorandum', charted by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and in 1987 of the 'Contributions to the Slovenian National Programme', written by sixteen individually signed authors and published in the magazine *Nova Revija*; both signalled the legitimization of open, public promotion of ethnocentric national platforms and thus the beginning of organized political-ideological contestation of the existing Yugoslav federal order and eventually the final breakdown of bridges between the republics' cultural institutions (Devic, 1998, p. 405) (Levi, 2007, p. 11).

Simultaneously "dissident artists, preferably writers , but also film directors, retrospectively started to be labelled as the representatives of the national literature and national film" (Komelj, 2012). Yugoslavian culture withered away and let space for Serbian cinema, Croatian literature, new Slovenian art...

Komelj, further argues, that "the greatest responsibility for Yugoslavia's catastrophe must be credited to anti-socialist political movements that, within the context of 'democratization processes' emerging during the second half of the 1980s, had launched a declared 'anti-totalitarian' interpretative matrix" that would ultimately lead to Yugoslavia's destruction (Komelj, 2012, p. 72).

Conclusion

Ultimately, in this dissertation, I wanted to discuss the contemporary narratives on Yugoslavia and its history in order to better understand the collapse and the history of Yugoslavia. In order to approach at best its history, I firstly decided to theoretically study post-socialist historical revisionism in order to identify and critically assess the dominant contemporary paradigms in the region. I quickly identified the two major paradigms: the ethno-nationalist and totalitarian, which allowed me to start studying Yugoslavia and its identity through the study of its culture. The latter was mainly conveyed and assimilated via the Yugoslav film and cinematography, so I started studying the post-Yugoslav narratives and I quickly discovered that the dominant anti-totalitarian paradigm prevailing in the post-Yugoslav context was not (solely) the result or the consequence of the end of socialism or the result of the local chauvinistic historiographies; the anti-totalitarian discourse was actually one of the main causes for the emergence of nationalism and therefore for the subsequent bloody collapse of Yugoslavia. Of course, this was not the only cause for the disintegration of Yugoslavia but nonetheless remains essential in the context of the 1980s, when in the name of human rights and freedom of speech, 'anti-totalitarian' intellectuals signed petitions for nationalist and chauvinists like Vojislav Seselj, Radovan Karadzic, Dobroslav Paraga, Adem Demaci, and many others which eventually led Yugoslavia to its bloody collapse.

However, as with every social science research, one should always remain careful and meticulous when assessing historical events in order to avoid any teleological bias. In our case as well, it is important to note the reasons lying behind Yugoslavia's collapse are complex and numerous and they need constant re-assessment and critical research from the academic sphere.

Former Yugoslavia



Appendix 1. Map of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Source: http://yourjerusalem.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/map_yugoslavia2.jpg, accessed on May 6th 2013))

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